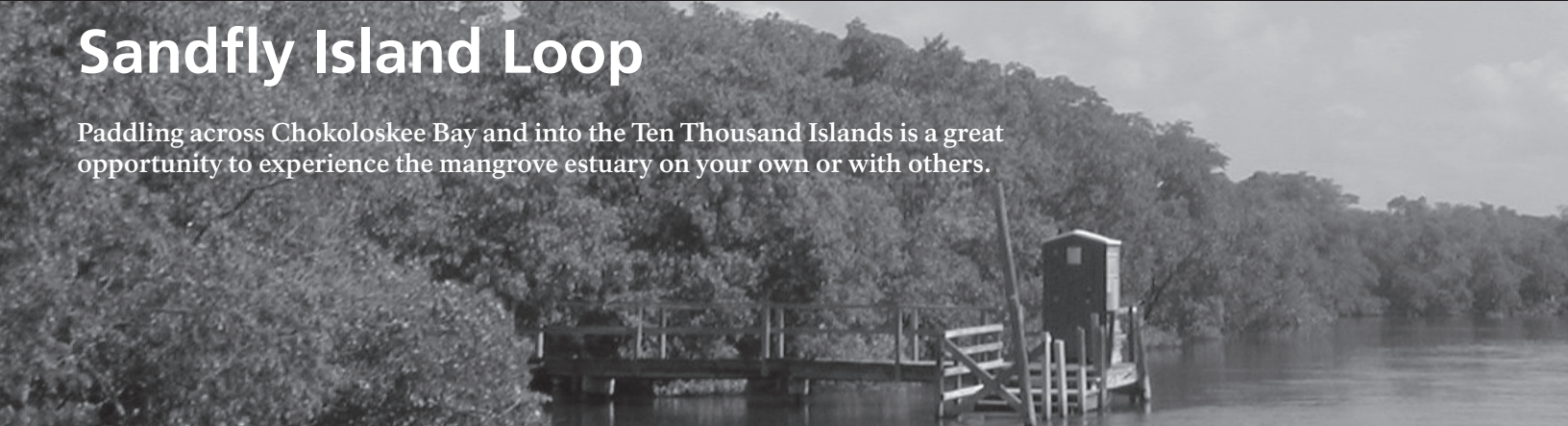




Sandfly Island Loop

Paddling across Chokoloskee Bay and into the Ten Thousand Islands is a great opportunity to experience the mangrove estuary on your own or with others.



The Mangrove Estuary and Sandfly Island

This trip is not a “swamp experience;” it is mostly open water. Estuaries are among the most productive ecosystems on earth. Here, fresh water flows from the Everglades to mix with the saltwater of the Gulf of Mexico. This exchange of nutrients from the two water sources supports abundant wildlife. You may see manatees (look for their coconut-like nose at the surface as they breathe,) dolphins, a variety of birds (along the shorelines, on the water, and flying overhead,) and fish, such as the mullet who frequently leap out of the water.

This trip involves paddling about a mile and a half across the open water of Chokoloskee Bay, a couple of miles in the islands, and paddling back across the bay. There is also a one mile walking trail on Sandfly Island. You can see the dock on Sandfly Island from the Gulf Coast Visitor Center.

Sandfly Island has a long human history. The island itself is a shell mound created by the Calusa Indians, who arrived in this area over two thousand years ago. In the early 1900s, settlers had a home, tomato farm, and even a store on the island. Today nature has reclaimed most of the island, and few signs of human settlement remain. If you walk quietly, you may see raccoons, turtles, mangrove tree crabs, or birds.

Logistics

Rent a canoe or kayak from one of many local businesses, or bring your own. If you rent, make sure you know what time your boat should be back. There is a public canoe and kayak launch behind the Gulf Coast Visitor Center. Try to time your trip as best you can to take advantage of rising and falling tides. A falling tide (between high and low) travels towards the islands and the Gulf of Mexico; a rising tide (between low and high) travels towards the Ranger Station and Everglades City.

When crossing the bay, keep some distance from the markers to avoid motorboat traffic. In Sandfly Pass, it is important to stay to the sides, as powerboats often use the center of the pass. If you decide to stop at Sandfly Island, please use the beach area next to the dock, as the dock can be slippery and difficult to get onto, especially when the current is strong. Always tie up your boat.

Everglades National Park is a protected area. Please leave everything as you find it. Do not remove or disturb any animals, plants, artifacts, or other objects you may discover, so that others may enjoy them as well.

Safety Tips

- Check the weather forecast before departing. Do not attempt to cross open water when there is lightning. If you get caught in open water when a storm threatens, stay as low as possible and head for the nearest shoreline, and remain low until the storm passes.
- Make sure you have paddles and life jackets for each person, and one throwable device (cushion, life ring, etc.) per vessel.
- Be careful when launching your canoe or kayak. The ramp can be slippery and unstable, particularly if your boat is not fully floating in the water. Move low in your boat to help keep it afloat.
- Winds, tides, powerboat wakes, gear storage, and people all affect the stability of your boat.
- Make sure gear is secured to the boat in case of tipping. Use a dry bag, and avoid taking valuables (especially items easily damaged by water) with you.
- If you do tip over, don’t panic or let go of your boat. In many areas, you will be in or near water shallow enough to stand in.
- Sharp objects, such as oysters and barnacles are common on the dock, on mangrove roots, and along the bottom. Closed toed shoes are recommended to avoid injury.
- On the Sandfly Island Trail, watch out for overhanging vegetation and exposed roots.
- Remember there are no marked trails in this portion of Everglades National Park. A compass and nautical chart are always recommended.

Sandfly Island Loop

This trip takes about 2½ hours. Add one hour to walk the trail on the island.

Add at least one hour if traveling against wind and tides.

Do not attempt to step off your vessel onto the dock. Land on the shore nearby and walk to the dock or trail from there. Always tie up your boat.

This map is intended as a reference only.
For more accurate information, purchase
nautical chart #11430 from area stores.

